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ABSTRACT

This study examined college students' knowledge and attitudes regarding children's gender, and social and moral norms, and compared their evaluations of violation of each norm type. Participating were 140 female and 67 male college students ranging in age from 17 to 46 years, 33 of whom were parents. Subjects were asked questions related to toys, games, play styles, adult occupations, adult parental roles, hairstyles, and clothing. They were also asked about social norms (eating ice cream with fingers versus a spoon and coughing on someone versus covering one's mouth) and moral norms (pinching someone and stealing money). For each item, participants were asked who usually played with or did the item or what was usually done; whether it was possible for a child of the other gender to do the item or if it could be done; and how they would feel about a child who violated the norm. Findings indicated that participants thought it possible to violate all norms except for becoming a parent of the other gender. Boys' gender norm violations were rated more negatively than girls', while both were rated less negatively than social or moral violations. Women rated gender norm violations more positively than men, but there were no sex differences in ratings of social or moral violations. Boys' appearance-related norm transgressions were rated more negatively than girls', but girls' loud rough play was rated more negatively than boys' quiet play. Other gender norm violations were seen as positive or neutral, except for Barbie play by boys. (KB)

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Adults' Attitudes about Children's Gender Norm Transgressions

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Abstract

College students were asked about children's gender norms including toys, games, play styles, adult occupations, adult parental roles, hairstyles, and clothing. Some social and moral norms were also included. Participants were asked about their knowledge of the norms and about the possibility as well as the desirability of violating them.

Participants thought it possible to violate all norms except for becoming a parent of the other gender. Boys' gender norm violations were judged as more serious than girls', while both were judged less serious than violations of social or moral norms. Boys' appearance-related norm transgressions were seen as more negative than girls', but girls' loud rough play was judged to be more negative than boys' quiet play. Other gender norm violations of both boys and girls were seen as positive or neutral.

Adults' Attitudes about Children's Gender Norm Transgressions

Several researchers have examined attitudes about children's adoption of cross-gender behaviors and attributes. While much of this research has examined children's attitudes, a few studies have surveyed adults' attitudes about children's gender norm violations (Levy, Taylor & Gelman, 1995; Martin, 1991; 1995).

The research with children has often included social and moral norm violations (e.g., Blakemore & Russ, 1997; Carter & Patterson, 1983; Damon, 1977; Stoddart & Turiel, 1985), however only one study with adults (Levy et al., 1995) has compared gender norms to social and moral norms. That study concluded that boys' gender norm violations were similar to moral violations, while girls' gender norm violations were similar to violations of social etiquette.

The study done by Levy et al. however, included only two male and two female role behaviors, and these behaviors were not directly comparable to each other. The authors suggested that a wider scope of comparisons were needed. In the present study we examined eight male and eight female gender-related items including items about physical appearance, role behaviors, play styles, occupations, and toys. Male and female items were directly comparable (e.g., girls' clothing vs. boys' clothing). We also asked about two social and two moral behaviors. We examined adults' views about the stereotyped nature of these items, beliefs about whether it was possible for the norms to be violated, and attitudes about whether it was desirable to do so. The study had the following goals:

1. Adults' judgments about the stereotyped nature of certain activities and behaviors were assessed to be certain that they did see these behaviors and activities as gender stereotyped or as socially appropriate.
2. The adults' judgments about the *possibility* of violating these gender, social and

moral norms were measured. The possibility of violating social, moral, and gender norms were compared.

3. Among the most important issue under study was a comparison of the adults' *evaluations* of the kinds of norm violations: male gender role, female gender role, social, and moral.

4. Several studies have found boys to be judged more harshly than girls for adopting cross-gender behavior. Therefore it was hypothesized that, as a category, boys' gender role violations would be judged to be more serious than girls'.

5. Finally, direct comparisons between matched gender role items were made. There were eight such comparisons: hairstyles, clothing, toys (2 pairs), activities, play styles, adult occupations, and adult parental roles.

Method

Participants

There were 207 (140 females; 67 males) adults who participated. They were students at a regional commuter campus of a state university. They ranged in age from 17 to 46 years of age (M = 21.67; SD = 6.01). There were 181 White, 13 African American, 6 Hispanic, 4 Asian and 3 "other" participants. The majority of the participants (N = 174) did not have children, although some participants (29 females; 4 males) were parents.

Materials

The participants were asked about 16 gender role items: boys' clothing; girls' clothing; boys' hairstyles; girls' hairstyles; toys cars; G. I. Joes; a toy kitchen; Barbie dolls; football; jumprope; loud, rough play; quiet, gentle play; becoming a nurse; becoming a doctor; becoming a mother; and becoming a father. The following items were accompanied by color pictures taken from a J. C. Penney catalog: boys' clothing (suits and ties, dress shoes); girls' clothing (dresses, ruffled socks,

dress shoes); toy cars, G. I. Joes; a toy kitchen; and Barbie dolls. In all cases where there were children or dolls, both African American and White models or dolls were pictured. The heads and hairstyles of the models were covered by a square piece of paper in the pictures of the clothing. The participants were also asked about two social norms (eating ice cream with fingers vs. a spoon; and coughing on someone vs. covering one's mouth) and two moral norms (pinching someone; and stealing money).

The participants were asked three questions about each item: who usually played with or did the item, or in the case of the social and moral items, what was usually done; whether it was possible for a child of the other gender to do the item, or in the case of the social and moral items, if it could be done; and how the participants would feel about a child who violated one of these norms. This latter item was scored on a 5-point scale ranging from very negatively to very positively. Sample questions can be seen in Table 1.

Results

Knowledge About the Stereotypes

Items were scored such that a score of "1" indicated the conventional direction (e.g., girls wear dresses; people eat ice cream with a spoon), and a score of "2" indicated the reverse of convention. The participants identified all the gender-related items in a strongly stereotyped direction (all means < 1.06). The moral items were also clearly answered in the direction of the norm (both means < 1.05) but the social items tended to have means closer to the neutral range. The participants indicated that people often don't cover their mouths when they cough (M = 1.47), and that they may sometimes eat ice cream with their fingers (M = 1.20).

The Possibility of Violating Gender, Social, and Moral Norms

The participants were asked if it was possible to violate these norms. These items were scored such that "1" = no and "2" = yes. Therefore scores above 1.5 indicated that the majority of

the participants believed the norm violation was indeed possible, and the closer the score was to 2.0, the stronger was the belief. Most items were judged possible to violate, with the exception of becoming a parent of the other gender. The scores for these items can be found in Table 2.

Evaluations of Norm Violations

The participants rated how they felt about the desirability of violating these norms on a 5-point scale ranging from very positively (5) to very negatively (1). The scores of the 20 items can be seen in Table 3. The most positively evaluated item by far was a girl becoming a doctor (4.67). Several other items, all consisting of gender norm violations (toys and activities primarily) of both boys and girls, were also rated above the midpoint on the scale. Below the midpoint of the scale were girls playing rough, boys playing with Barbie dolls, all the appearance violations for both genders, becoming a parent of the other gender, and all the social and moral violations.

The average scores measuring the desirability of violating the masculine, feminine, social, and moral norms were examined with a 4 (repeated measure - question type: social, moral, masculine, feminine) X 2 (participants' gender) mixed design ANOVA. This analysis found a main effect of question type, $F(3,615) = 329.44$, $p < .001$. There was also an effect of participants' gender, $F(1,205) = 5.23$, $p < .05$, and a Gender X Question Type interaction, $F(3,615) = 3.81$, $p < .01$. Further analyses found that the participants rated girls' cross gender norm violations most positively ($M = 3.12$), followed by those of boys ($M = 2.82$), followed by social norm violations ($M = 2.18$), followed by moral norm violations ($M = 1.51$). Women rated the boys' gender norm violations more positively than men did (Women's $M = 2.91$; Men's $M = 2.64$). The same was true for the girls' gender norm violations (Women's $M = 3.19$; Men's $M = 2.98$). There were no gender differences in the rating of the social or moral items. These evaluations can be seen presented in Figure 1.

Evaluations of Boys' versus Girls' Gender Norm Violations

The participants' evaluations of comparable gender-related items (e.g., boys' hairstyles vs. girls' hairstyles) were also examined. This resulted in comparisons of eight pairs of items: hairstyles, clothing, occupations, parent roles, play styles, activities (football vs. jumprope), dolls (G.I. Joes vs. Barbies), and the toy kitchen vs. toy cars. A series of repeated measures ANOVAs were done to compare the evaluations of the masculine and feminine pairs. The comparisons can be seen in Figure 2. Three of these analyses (kitchen/cars, parent roles & football/jumprope) produced no effect of the masculine versus feminine comparison: the boys' and girls' gender norm transgressions were evaluated similarly. In four cases the boys' cross-gender behavior was judged more to be negative than the comparable girls' behavior, and in one case the girls' cross-gender behavior was judged to be more negative than the comparable boys' behavior. A boy having a girl's hairstyle ($M = 1.97$) was evaluated more negatively than a girl having a boy's hairstyle ($M = 2.88$), $F(1,206) = 169.71$, $p < .001$; a boy wearing girls' clothing ($M = 1.46$) was evaluated more negatively than a girl wearing boys' clothing ($M = 2.43$), $F(1,206) = 171.58$, $p < .001$; a boy wanting to become a nurse ($M = 3.73$) was evaluated more negatively than a girl wanting to become a doctor ($M = 4.67$), $F(1,206) = 156.82$, $p < .001$; and a boy playing with Barbie dolls ($M = 2.66$) was evaluated more negatively than a girl playing with G. I. Joes ($M = 3.27$), $F(1,206) = 70.20$, $p < .001$. The one case in which a cross gender behavior of girls was evaluated more negatively than the comparable one for boys was in the case of play styles, in which boys playing quietly ($M = 3.83$) was evaluated more positively than girls playing loudly and roughly ($M = 2.86$), $F(1,206) = 126.50$, $p < .001$.

Factor Analysis of Evaluation Scores

Since some previous research (Levy et al., 1995) suggested that boys' gender norm violations are seen as more like moral violations, and girls' gender norm violations are more like

violations of social norms, the evaluative scores were factor analyzed. Since there were three theoretical categories (gender, social, and moral), a three-factor solution was forced. However, the three factors did not fit the gender, social, and moral categories. The first factor, accounting for 19.75% of the variance, consisted of most of the gender norm violations. The second factor, accounting for an additional 14.68% of the variance, consisted of the remaining gender norm violations: the parent role norm violations, both appearance violations of boys, and girls wearing boys' clothing. Boys playing with Barbie dolls loaded on both of these factors. The third factor, accounting for an additional 10.18% of the variance, consisted of the four social and moral norm violations. The item "girl playing loudly and roughly" didn't load on any factor. Factor loadings can be seen in Table 4.

Finally, a mean score for each factor was calculated by averaging the evaluative score of all items loading on each of the three factors. These mean factor scores were analyzed with a 3 (repeated measure - factors 1 to 3) X 2 (gender) mixed design ANOVA. This analysis found a main effect of factor, $F(2,410) = 492.66$, $p < .001$. There was also an effect of participants' gender, $F(1,205) = 9.69$, $p < .002$, and a Gender X Factor interaction, $F(2,410) = 4.17$, $p < .02$. Further analyses found that the mean score obtained from the items included in Factor 1 ($M = 3.47$) was significantly higher than the Factor 2 score ($M = 2.11$), $F(1,205) = 916.12$, $p < .001$, which was in turn significantly higher than the Factor 3 score ($M = 1.84$), $F(1,205) = 14.00$, $p < .001$. In other words, the first category of gender norm violations was viewed more positively than was the second category. Both categories of gender norm violations were viewed more positively than were the social and moral norm violations.

Women gave more positive evaluations of the Factor 1 items (Women's $M = 3.57$; Men's $M = 3.27$, $F(1,205) = 13.07$, $p < .001$), and also of the Factor 2 items (Women's $M = 2.17$; Men's $M =$

1.95, $F(1,205) = 5.69$, $p < .02$). Men and women were equally negative in their evaluation of the Factor 3 social and moral items.

Conclusions

- Participants identified all norms in the expected direction
- Most norms were believed possible to violate, except for the biological categories of "mother" and "father"
- As a category, boys' gender norm violations seen as more negative than girls', but not as negative as social or moral norm violations
- Examined separately, certain gender norm violations of both boys and girls were seen as positive, and others as negative
- Girls' loud, rough play negative
- Boys' appearance-related violations especially negative
- Two gender factors – one evaluated more negatively than the other, but both more positive than social and moral norm violations
- Becoming the other gender (i.e., a mother or father), or wearing their clothing (especially by boys) viewed negatively
- Toys (except Barbies), activities, and occupations were seen as relatively positive when done by the other gender
- Not all cross gender behavior on the part of either boys or girls was viewed negatively, and boys' violations were not always seen as worse than girls'
- There is reason for some optimism for those who want to encourage greater flexibility in children's gender-related behavior

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Table 1
Sample Questions Asked of the Adults

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1. On the screen there is a picture of a toy kitchen. Who usually plays with a toy kitchen like this?
   a) Boys
   b) Girls

2. Is it possible for a boy to play with a toy kitchen?
   a) Yes
   b) No

3. How would you feel about a boy who plays with a toy kitchen?
   a) Very negatively
   b) Somewhat negatively
   c) Neutral
   d) Somewhat positively
   e) Very positively

4. How does a child eat ice cream?[a]
   a) With a spoon
   b) With his/her fingers

5. Is it possible for a child to eat ice cream with his/her fingers?[a]
   a) Yes
   b) No

6. How would you feel about a child who eats ice cream with his/her fingers?[a]
   a) Very negatively
   b) Somewhat negatively
   c) Neutral
   d) Somewhat positively
   e) Very positively

Other items included:
Toy Cars (accompanied by picture), G. I. Joes (accompanied by picture), Barbies (accompanied by picture), Boy hair (accompanied by picture), Girl hair (accompanied by picture), Boy clothes (accompanied by picture), Girl clothes (accompanied by picture), Nurse, Doctor, Mommy, Daddy, Playing Football, Playing jump-rope, Loud and rough play with jumping and yelling, Quiet/gentle play, Coughing on another person (versus covering their mouth)[a], Pinching (versus saying hello when meeting someone)[b], Stealing money (versus asking for it)[b]

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[a]Social Item
[b]Moral item

Table 2

Judgments about the Possibility of Engaging in Gender Role, Moral, and Social Transgressions

Transgression	Rating[a]
Boy playing jumprope	1.99
Boy playing with kitchen	1.99
Girl playing rough	1.99
Boy becoming nurse	1.99
Coughing on someone	1.98
Girl becoming doctor	1.97
Boy playing quietly	1.97
Girl playing with cars	1.97
Girl having boys' hairstyle	1.97
Stealing money	1.97
Pinching someone	1.97
Girl playing with G.I. Joes	1.96
Eating with fingers	1.96
Boy playing with Barbies	1.95
Girl playing football	1.94
Girl wearing boys' clothes	1.84
Boy having girls' hairstyle	1.82
Boy wearing girls' clothes	1.67
Boy becoming mommy	1.33
Girl becoming daddy	1.27

[a]An answer of yes was coded "2", and an answer of no was coded "1", therefore scores above 1.5 tend to indicate that the children believed the norm violation to be possible.

Table 3

Evaluative Ratings of Gender-Role, Moral, and Social Transgressions

Transgression	Evaluation[a]
Girl becoming doctor	4.67
Boy playing quietly	3.83
Boy becoming nurse	3.73
Girl playing football	3.48
Boy playing jumprope	3.45
Girl playing with cars	3.38
Boy playing with kitchen	3.37
Girl playing with G.I. Joes	3.27
Girl having boys' hairstyle	2.88
Girl playing rough	2.86
Boy playing with Barbies	2.66
Eating with fingers	2.50
Girl wearing boys' clothes	2.43
Boy becoming mommy	2.09
Girl becoming daddy	2.01
Boy having girls' hairstyle	1.97
Coughing on someone	1.86
Pinching someone	1.67
Boy wearing girls' clothes	1.46
Stealing money	1.34

[a]Items were scored on a 5-point scale, with 5 in the positive direction.

Table 4

Factor Loadings of Evaluations of Gender, Social, and Moral Norm Violations

Norm Violations	Factor Loading		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Girl becoming doctor	.51	–	–
Boy becoming nurse	.58	–	–
Girl playing rough	–	–	–
Boy playing quietly	.61	–	–
Girl playing football	.54	–	–
Boy playing jumprope	.71	–	–
Girl playing with cars	.78	–	–
Boy playing with kitchen	.71	–	–
Girl playing with G.I. Joes	.74	–	–
Boy playing with Barbies	.49	.42	–
Girl having boys' hairstyle	.42	–	–
Boy having girls' hairstyle	–	.58	–
Girl wearing boys' clothes	–	.60	–
Boy wearing girls' clothes	–	.65	–
Girl becoming father	–	.74	–
Boy becoming mother	–	.74	–
Eating with fingers	–	–	.62
Coughing on someone	–	–	.76
Pinching someone	–	–	.71
Stealing money	–	–	.60

Figure 1. Evaluations of Social, Moral, and Gender-Role Deviations

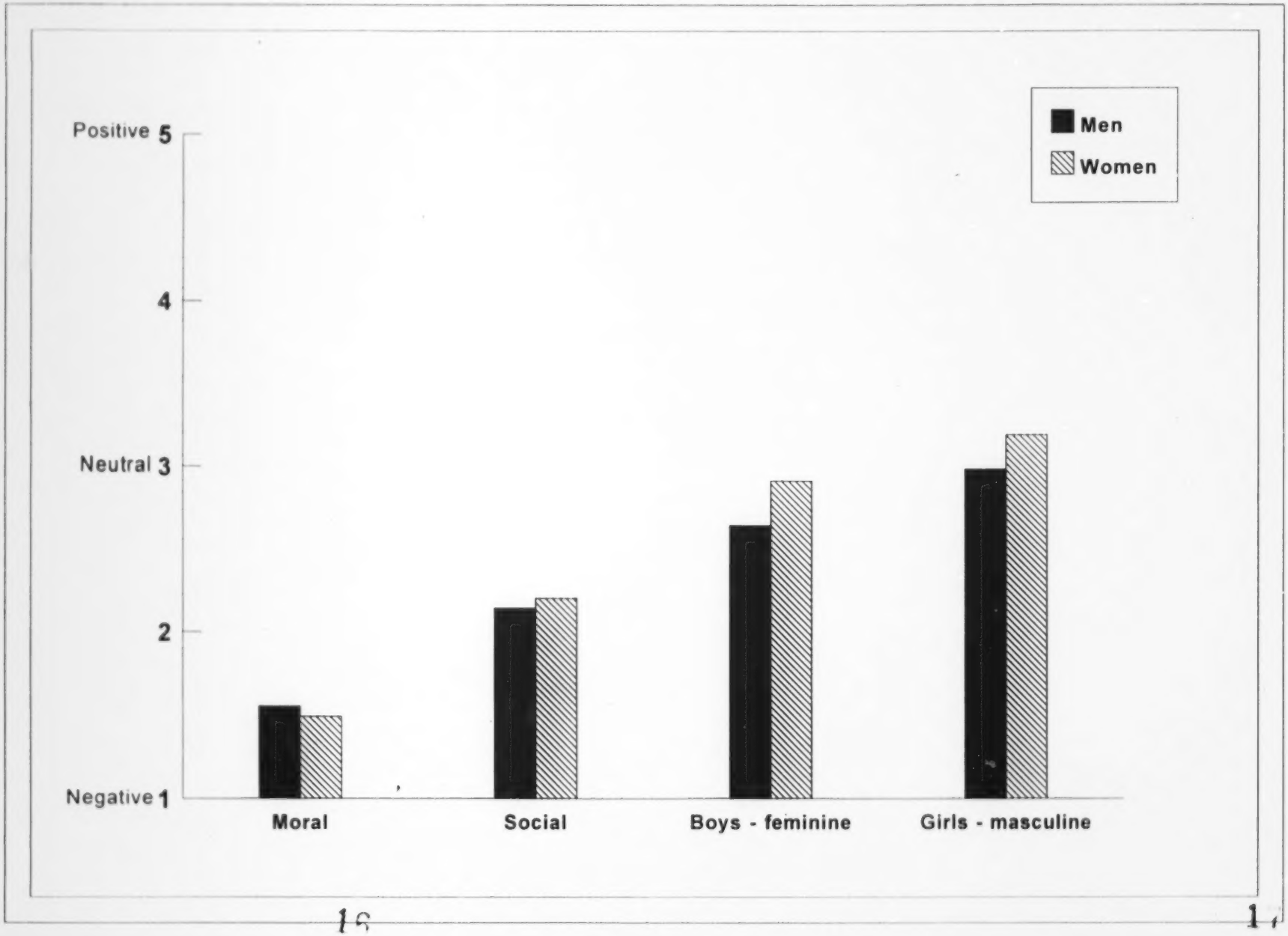

Figure 2. Evaluations of Comparable Gender-role Deviations